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Paul Shillinger's Fun Facts & Helpful Hints

Wacky Bubble Tricks

As bubble machines are still not standard equipment for every performance group, there hasn't been nearly as much experimentation with them as there has been with, say, fog machines. But, due to Theatre Effects' devotion to the advancement of special effects (and the fact that I really like fooling around with this stuff), we've taken matters into our own hands. I have spent the past several days sealed in the Theatre Effects Danger Room (TM), and have come up with a few new ways to use your bubbler.

First things first, when you're using a bubble machine, remember that higher is better. Even though the bubble machine has a built-in fan that will shoot the bubbles up to eight feet into the air, placing it as high as possible increases the appeal of the effect. With the machine closer to the ceiling, the bubbles appear to be cascading magically out of the air. Also, the built-in fan tends to shoot bubbles out at a high speed, allowing them to rise a bit and then fall creates a slower, gentler-looking effect. If you're looking for a "bubble storm", I would recommend setting up the machine on the floor to take advantage of the higher speed.

So, you've created your bubble storm (or your gentle bubble shower, depending), now what to do? An interesting effect can be achieved by lighting the bubbles with a strobe light. The "stop motion" look created by the strobe, combined with the

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cloud of bubbles, creates a disorienting, somewhat psychedelic effect. This particular effect could be a great addition to a haunted attraction, rock concert or nightclub. Of course, anyone using this sort of effect in a haunted attraction should take all the necessary precautions for strobe light use.

Bubbles can also be used in conjunction with fog for a cool new look. By directing the output of a small fog machine into the fan intake on the bubble machine, you can create a storm of "smoke-filled" bubbles that burst into tiny clouds of fog. Since the bubbles are now filled with opaque, white fog, they'll also be more visible from the audience. For best results, this trick should be done with the fog output set fairly low, so as not to overwhelm the bubbles in a cloud of fog.

A word of caution for this last trick it is not generally recommended that the output of a fog machine be directed into a fan. The reason for this is that the fan will begin to accumulate residue from the fog, and may eventually stop working due to this buildup. One way to reduce the amount of residue is to keep an airspace of around two inches between the fog output and the fan intake.

Of course, we realize that this is just the tip of the iceberg of what is possible with this machine. If you have a favorite trick or tip for using bubbles in performance, we'd love to hear about it. In the meantime, our research continues. To the Danger Room!!

Take Care,
Paul

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